

The Happy Pilgrim

by Jim Cymbala

Jim Cymbala's sermon emphasizes that true worship is about experiencing God's presence rather than visiting physical sacred sites.

Duration: 26:57

Scripture: Psalm 84:5-7, Psalm 84:10, Matthew 26:28, Matthew 28:1-6, Luke 2:7, John 19:17, Acts 2:1-4

Topics: "Pilgrims"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker addresses the challenge of getting people to come to church in a world filled with distractions. He emphasizes the importance of people wanting to be in church and suggests seeking guidance from God on how to address this issue. The speaker highlights the significance of experiencing God's presence and how it can transform individuals. He also references Psalm 84, which speaks about the desire to be in God's presence and the blessings that come from it.

Transcript

There's a case going on right now that I've been following in the news with a Board of Ed teacher in some state, and I don't know the state, it might be New Jersey, but I'm not sure, but here are the facts of the case. The teacher is a Muslim, and she is brand new to the teaching profession in that state that she's in, and she's only taught about three months, but she's asking for either a six or nine-month paid leave so that she could do a hajj, which is to make the once-a-lifetime trip that all Muslims are to make to go to Mecca and do religious observances in Mecca. It's a pilgrimage that they make.

The facts and merits of the case I'm not interested in, but that's an interesting thought that in the Muslim religion, there are pilgrimages. People go all the way to Mecca to do holy observances, and that's something you have to do in your lifetime, I think, as part of the teaching of the Muslim faith. Now, Christians don't go on pilgrimages because there are no sacred sites to the Christian.

Nothing is sacred. No building, no geographical area is sacred. Nowhere in the New Testament are things mentioned that you think would be mentioned.

For example, brothers and sisters, please come to Bethlehem and come to the original manger where Jesus was born. The manger's never mentioned again. Everyone should once in their lifetime go to the hill called Golgotha where our Savior was crucified.

Never mentioned. He died, shed His blood, never mentioned again. Let's go to the tomb.

This is the tomb. \$20, I'll give you a tour of the tomb with a T-shirt, I was in the tomb. No, no tomb, no trips to the tomb.

See, some of you are looking at me because you're thinking about this for the first time. Nowhere did anyone say church in Colossae, you're getting backslid. What you need to do is come to the upper room where the Spirit was poured out in Acts, the second chapter because if you'll sit on those same chairs, this is where Peter sat.

James and John were over there, not even mentioned like it never even happened. For in the New Testament, no geographical location, no object is accounted holy except our bodies. They had learned from Jesus once and for all doing away with thousands of years of Hebrew teaching of the Old Testament when Jesus said, oh no, Jerusalem worship or in Samaria? No, no, no, it doesn't matter.

For the Father seeks those who will worship Him. And when He said that, He dispensed with thousands of years of Old Testament Jewish history. Just did away with it in one sentence.

Doesn't even mean a thing. But it did, as we'll get to in a second. Now, did you know that what provoked the Protestant Reformation was partly the Roman Catholic emphasis on this very thing, pilgrimages to Rome? Martin Luther's story, the great German reformer, he went as a young monk to Rome to see what was called the Holy City.

I can assure you there are no holy cities except the New Jerusalem, which is gonna come down from above. And when he went there and saw the corruption of the church and the people, he was totally flabbergasted. But what really provoked him to put the 95 thesis on the door of the church at Wittenberg in Germany that started the Protestant Reformation, Time Magazine said it was, I think, in their observance of the most important events over the last 1,000 years, when the year 2000 came, I think that was number one or number two.

I think they put number one, the invention of the printing press. But number two, I think, was the Protestant Reformation. Changed the world.

One of the things that got Luther was the indulgences that were being sold. Pay a certain amount of money and that will get your relatives out of purgatory for 1,000 years, 500 years, depending on what you pay. He couldn't see that in scripture because it's not there.

But the other thing that got him was the pilgrimages and the relics that people would go and see without going to Rome. They would go to a church 200 miles away. Why? Because that church said, we just discovered that we have, you gotta come and touch it because it'll bring blessing to your life, pieces of the original wood from the cross.

We have three nails from the cross. We have fragments of the basket that Moses was put in and superstitious people would go and pay money or go and kneel before them, kiss these sacred objects and that was part of what was called religion, Christianity, in fact. But of course, in the New Testament, we do not find that and one of the things of the Protestant Reformation was no building is sacred.

God is no more here at this altar than he is on the number three train going up to Manhattan. How many thank God that he's on the three train? Come on, can we put our hands together? If you have an

emergency, you don't say, oh, I gotta get to the church. I gotta get to the church.

Well, what if you can't get to the church? He's as close as the mention of his name. So that's an important thing to remember. But it wasn't always that way.

In the Old Testament, that was not true. The Old Testament was very much the teaching of the Jewish religion and Israel was very much focused on Jerusalem. After a while, after the time of David, God had always said, when you build a temple and you offer sacrifices, it cannot be just anywhere.

Now that you've settled in the land, it can only be in one spot and that's where they built the temple. So the worship involved coming to Jerusalem to the temple, to that one spot where you were allowed to offer blood sacrifices. But not only that, in that temple, well, in the tabernacle before, and no one knows this mysterious moment when things change, but when the tabernacle was originally built, there was the presence of God in some kind of cloud-like way that was above the mercy seat, the Ark of the Covenant in what was called the Holy of Holies.

The high priest would only go in there one time a year. What he saw, he never shared. But when they were traveling in the wilderness, before they settled, the cloud would come up from above the tabernacle, the Holy of Holies, and when the cloud moved, the people knew, we're moving, God's going before us.

And when they settled in the land, it was in Jerusalem that the temple was constructed. So every worship connection was Jerusalem, the temple. Jerusalem, the temple.

It was about a city and a building and a place and the precincts, and that was the only place you could offer a sacrifice. If you sinned and wanted to offer a sacrifice, you couldn't do it in your house. That was only Passover time, what we learned last week.

Once they got in the land, you had to go to Jerusalem. In fact, every male Jew in good standing in his religion would make three or four trips a year to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover, Feast of Tabernacles, and they would go in caravans. And they would travel from up in north in Galilee or wherever they were, and they would just come singing, praising God, it would take them days to get there, and there's a whole bunch of Psalms that are called the Psalms of the Ascents going up to Jerusalem.

Even if you were in the north and went south, you were going up to Jerusalem because it was revered and it was built up high, so you were always going up to Jerusalem. Why were you going up? To worship. And if you were a priest and you were on duty, you were on duty in Jerusalem a certain amount of weeks per year.

Everything was Jerusalem and the temple. And of course now, this is totally untrue for any of us. Remember that.

There are no sacred buildings, there's no holy place. If they built something in Jerusalem, it'd be worth nothing because God does not dwell in buildings, God dwells in our hearts. You are the temple of the Holy Spirit.

Now, in the Old Testament, the thought of getting to God's presence meant going to Jerusalem. The thought of worshiping meant going to Jerusalem. And if you lived far away or there was a time of war and you couldn't get to Jerusalem, that was a problem because now you were cut off from God's presence.

Now, this Psalm that we're about to read was not written by David. It was written by a worship leader who was one of the sons of Korah and Korah's family were involved in the worship that went on in the temple. And for some reason that we don't know, always remember, David didn't write every Psalm.

Some Psalms, we don't know who wrote them. This Psalm is written by an unknown person and the commentators and experts can't place when it was written. We just know this, this man who loves God and loves God's presence and wants to be in God's house, he can't get there.

Something's hindering him, but he's remembering now the caravans and the pilgrimages, pilgrimages that were made. So when we read this, we're first gonna find out what it meant to them and then we're gonna say, what does it mean to us today? It's in Scripture. What application does it have? Tell me if you know any of the verses found in this Psalm, Psalm 84.

Look at it. How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord Almighty. My soul yearns, even faints for the courts of the Lord.

My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God. Even the sparrow has found a home and to swallow a nest for herself, where she may have her young, a place near your altar, O Lord Almighty, my King and my God. And what he's speaking of there is the temple had an outer court and precincts and birds would come and make nests there and he's saying, wow, I wish I was like the birds.

At least they can get close to you. At least they can be in the temple and I'm cut off for whatever reason. Blessed are those who dwell in your house.

They are ever praising you. Know this, whenever you get in the presence of God and you experience God's presence, you will begin praising him. When people never praise God, never exalt God, they're strangers to God's presence.

When you experience God, he is so awesome, you just go hallelujah. Notice, blessed are those who dwell in your house. They are ever praising you.

They can't stop. That's why in heaven, there's gonna be a lot of praising. Blessed are those whose strength is in you who have set their hearts on what? Pilgrimage.

They gotta get where God is. As they pass through the valley of Baca, which means weeping, they make it a place of springs. The autumn rains also cover it with pools or that word could mean blessings or pools of blessings.

They go from strength to strength until each appears before God in Zion. Hear my prayer, oh Lord God almighty. Listen to me, oh God of Jacob.

Look upon our shield, oh God. Look with favor on your anointed one, probably the king. Better, how many know this verse? Better is one day in your courts than what? A thousand elsewhere.

I'd rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked with all their money and all that they have. For the Lord God is a son and a shield. The Lord bestows favor and honor.

No good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless or sincere and are the real deal with him. Oh Lord almighty, blessed is the man who trusts in you. Now just focus on these verses.

Blessed are those whose strength is in you who have set their hearts on pilgrimage. As they pass through the valley of Baca, they make it a place of springs. The autumn rains also cover it with pools.

They go from strength to strength till each appears before God in Zion. This psalmist is the real deal. This is a sincere, serious man.

And what he's saying, he's lamenting and he's remembering past pilgrimages and he's talking about the blessedness of a certain kind of person, the joy that that person has, the favor that that person has from God. And what he's saying here is, man, I remember the days when I would make the pilgrimage and I would travel no matter how long it took, why? Because he says, I wanted to be where God is. My soul, my heart, my flesh cry out for the living God.

I don't want to go to the temple. I only want to go to the temple because God's presence is there. I want to be where God is.

I want to experience his presence. I want to be a worshiper. I long for him.

I don't want to go to church on Sunday. I only want to go to church on Sunday so with my other brothers and sisters, I can experience the presence of God. Religion isn't about where you go on Sunday or Tuesday night.

Religion is about you've been captivated by God and you want to experience him and know him better. And this means more to this guy than anything else. My soul, my heart, and my flesh cry out for the living God.

My number one desire in the world is not money or pleasure or nicer clothes or a better house or a PhD. Look, all those things have their place but what I want is God. Notice, I don't want to know more about God.

You can know about God and not know God. You can be religious and nasty as a hornet because you don't know God, you know about God. But knowing about God doesn't change you.

Only God's presence in us, communion with him, that's what softens us and fills us with his love. This man here, he's the real deal. He wants God.

You could say he wants revival. He wants to know more about God. I know I'm blessed by a congregation like you all but I talk to pastors who tell me, Brother Jim, what am I gonna do? Our services on Sunday, they go one hour.

If I go two minutes past one hour, the people start walking out. Even if I'm serving communion because hey, I've been there too long. I give you an hour, that's all I give.

Now, they'll watch an NFL, NBA game for three hours. If it goes in overtime, they're cheering because the game will be longer. They'll go to a movie and watch it for more than two hours.

That doesn't bother them. But just one hour in God's presence? No, I gotta get out of here, come on. Am I right, brother? Am I right? Now, I ask you this.

I'm not a legalist. I know you know I believe in grace. Why would God punish people who act like that and send them to heaven? Because in heaven, there's nothing but God.

There's no TV, there's no movies, no entertainment, no sports, just God. The Bible says he's coming for those who long for his appearing. I wonder how many people go to church this Sunday and across the world are longing for his appearing, who want to be with him so bad they can't take it.

When I speak to pastors and try to encourage them, I say, look, we all have to give an answer for the kind of church we build. If you're building a church where the people don't want to be there, basically, and don't want to be in God's presence, wouldn't come to a prayer meeting, don't want to wait and linger and worship like you all were worshiping, then what are we doing this for? I'm asking a question, what are we doing it for? What's the whole point of it? In other words, if they don't want to be with God now, why would they want to be with God forever? Does that sound logical and truthful? So this is a heart check for all of us. What's the number one thing you desire? Is it God and his presence? Have you found out that verse is true, oh, taste and see that the Lord is what? Not knowing about him, taste, experience the Lord, and you'll find out that he is good.

He is good. Because a lot of it can just happen to us like it happened to Israel. With their mouth, they honor me, but their hearts are far from me.

They want to experience me and let me work in their lives. They just want a form of religion, but they deny the power of it. So this psalm does a heart check on all of us.

What are we really living for? You know, I told the pastor the other day, I said, look, pastor, you're asking me questions about your church in another state, just know this, or how to get people to come to a prayer meeting or build a prayer meeting. If you think people are gonna come because they're supposed to, you can forget that. There's too many other voices.

There's the internet, there's Broadway, there's movies, there's cable, there's all these things. People are only gonna come to church, bottom line, because they want to be there. If they don't want to be there, they're not gonna come, there's too many other things.

Well, no, I call a prayer meeting and three people come. Nobody comes, what should I do? I said, I don't know what you should do, but what you should start to do is talk to God about it, get some direction, but people gotta start to experience God because when they experience God, it's not like, oh, no, the prayer meeting. It's like, hallelujah, the prayer meeting, we can call on God.

So here's our lessons that are applicable to us today. We know about his pilgrimage, we know why he wanted to go. He wanted to experience God, he wanted to worship.

We could also look at it this way. The pilgrimage for us is not to just experience God, but to see him face to face. We're gonna see him as he really is.

We're gonna see the face of Jesus. How many are looking forward to seeing the face of Jesus? We're gonna be in his presence. We won't have blessings from him, we're gonna have him.

Now, if you have no appetite for him, there's nothing I can say to make you want that. How can I make you want God? You have to taste and see that the Lord is good. You have to open your heart and say, God, is there a difference between going to church and experiencing you? Let's see what we learn here.

Isn't this odd, number one? You can have God, but the more you have him, the more you want God. Well, wait a minute, are you satisfied or are you hungry? You're both. This is an odd thing about Christianity and

true religion.

It's not like you don't have, it's not like you're not saved, it's not like the Holy Spirit doesn't dwell in you if you're born again. It's not that you don't know Jesus has forgiven you. You know that, and yet knowing that and tasting of his presence makes you want more.

So you never sit back and say, hey, listen, you're not talking to me about anything. I've been there, done that. No, no, blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they what? Notice, they're blessed while they're hungering.

This is an odd thing about Christianity. If you're hungry, you're happy. If you have no appetite, you're depressed.

A healthy Christian is one who's saying, thank you, Jesus, and thank you, Father, for sending your son, but at the same time, there's a discontent. Oh, I want to be more like the Lord. Oh, I'm not like Jesus like I should be.

Oh, I sense his presence on Sunday. I want more, though. I want more, there's more, there's more.

Oh, I read the word, and he spoke to me. I'm not content, I want more now. Speak to me more from your word.

I'm learning the Bible. I'm not content, I want to know the Bible better. Do you get it? In other words, when we serve the Lord, there's a healthy hunger.

You know, one of the signs of a sick child is they don't want to eat. Or a sick adult, no appetite. I visited someone in the hospital a few weeks ago.

They hadn't eaten in two days. Lost their appetite, not a good sign. What's a good sign when you're healthy? You're hungry.

Same thing with God. You have food, but you're hungry. The thing about the world is, you can have too much of the world, and you get sick of the thing you wanted.

Whether it's food or some sinful indulgence, you get sick of it. Now you have to get a new high. You got to go into some new bazaar, and you got to do your thing.

But with Jesus, you can never overdose. Come on, the more we taste and see, the more we want, never get sick of God. You can never be in too many meetings.

You never can be in too many prayer meetings in a row. Every time he comes, it's fresh and new, right? Oh, praise God. I believe we should just thank God for who he is.

Okay, so now we see some things. This guy is real. He's the real deal.

He's sincere. He puts his trust in God. And he has enjoyed God's presence, and now he wants more of God's presence.

Notice why the Bible says he's blessed. Blessed in the Bible means when we bless God, we elevate God, we exalt God, we worship God. When we say, blessed is the king of kings, we're lifting God up, extolling him.

When God blesses us, and we're blessed by him, it's not only that he's doing good things in our life, but there's a joy and a contentment and an overflow. Oh, how blessed is the man. How happy to be envied, full of spiritual joy, the Amplified Bible says.

Well, who is this person who's so blessed? The person whose heart is on pilgrimage. That person is blessed by God. Notice what God does for that person.

When they get to the Valley of Baca, which means weeping, springs of fresh water come from out of nowhere. Now, let's analyze that. Just because you love God and want God and you trust God doesn't mean you won't go through a Valley of Baca.

You might be in one today, across the street, you might be going through a Valley of Baca. The bottom's falling out. You're in a place of weeping.

Someone's hurt you, someone walked out on you, someone's trying to destroy you, someone on the job, someone whatever. Just because we're Christians doesn't mean we don't cry, doesn't mean we don't get hurt. But notice what God does for the person whose heart is on pilgrimage.

When they get to the Valley of Baca, the place where other people fail and give up and get destroyed, the person who wants God more than anything else, the Valley of Baca, the Valley of weeping, the difficult place in the journey and the difficult place in life, suddenly springs of living water start flowing up in them. In the very place where Satan said, I'll kill you, God says, no, you won't kill him. I'm gonna bless him with springs of living water.

Like Joseph said, what the devil meant for evil or as the Bible said, what the devil meant for evil, God works for good. So remember that. When you go through the Valley of weeping and you're going through that hard spot, it's not a place like, oh, it's a place like, oh, what's he gonna do now? He's gonna refresh me.

In the most difficult moment, he's gonna send a blessing inside of me that I've never known before. New joy, new peace in the very spot where the devil would suggest to you, I'll kill you there. No, you're not gonna kill you there.

There's gonna be springs in the desert. But notice there's more. The poetic imagery points upward and says, and the autumn rains leave pools of blessing.

Not only are there springs of refreshing in the Valley of Baca, in the valley where you don't think you can make it, God says, you will make it because you want me and my presence because you're sincere about serving me. I'm gonna not only refresh you, I'm gonna pour out pools of blessing that you've never had in your life. You've never experienced it.

You didn't think it would come in that spot. No, I've seen your heart and I know your sincerity. So I will refresh you and I'm gonna give you pools of blessing.

There'll be so many that are gonna form. They won't be able to take it in. There'll be pools, abundance.

On that journey that you're going through today in the Valley of Baca, the place of disappointment, desolation, God says, no, I'll refresh you with springs and I'll pour blessings on your head. You won't even be able to count what I'm gonna do. But not only that, they will go from strength to strength until they finish

the journey and appear before God in Jerusalem.

God says, you want me and you desire me and you seek me and you trust me and you're sincere? You're not gonna stagger across the line. You're not gonna just like limp across the line. You were running good for a while, but now you're gonna just like, please let me finish.

No, no. You will go from strength to more strength and even more strength and you're gonna finish high and strong because God, God will never forsake anybody who wants him.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/24/SID24115.mp3>
Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/jim-cymbala/the-happy-pilgrim/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net